MARJORIE LIU
SANA TAKEDA
MONSTRESS
image
ISSUE 16

THE MONSTRESS STORY SO FAR...

On the Isle of Bones, Maika finally learned a key detail about her mysterious past: her mother, Moriko, deliberately conceived Maika with an eye-marked descendant of the Shaman-Empress so that Maika could inherit the Shaman-Empress's power — and Zinn, the Monstrum that now lives beneath her skin.

After a series of close calls and catastrophes following that trip to the Isle, Maika was offered safe harbor in the city of Pontus if she agreed to activate the famed Pontus Shield, a task only descendants of the Shaman-Empress could perform. But when Maika stepped into the shield apparatus, it surged with overwhelming power that left the apparatus itself in shambles.

With war on the horizon, Maika and her allies knew that repairing the shield was essential to their survival. Unfortunately, the parts and knowledge necessary to fix the shield could only be found in the Southern Laboratory of the Shaman-Empress, a locked compound far beneath Pontus that no one had been able to access for millennia. Knowing the chances of success were slim, Maika and Zinn descended to the lab and, against all odds, opened its long-locked door, bracing for whatever they might find inside.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh. In her current possession are two clues to her past: a photograph, and a fragment of a mask that many would kill to possess.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

TUYA Maika's closest friend in the world, who has been with her since before the Battle of Constantine. Unbeknownst to Maika, she is also the Baroness of the Last Dusk, a high-level member of the Arcanic Dusk Court tasked with containing — or even destroying — Maika's power.

SHAMAN-EMPRESS The first and most powerful Arcanic who ever lived, a sciencemaster of the highest order and Zinn's beloved. Maika is her direct descendant, and bears her Mark of the Eye.

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Tuya...you said once that it was easier to be friends when we were slaves.
Too exhausted, hungry, and afraid to be defended against each other...
...or to lie.
I never told you how close I kept you. How fiercely I held you to my heart.
I survived because of you.
But I'm beginning to forget, Tuya. You are beginning to fade inside of me.
WHAT IS THAT HUMMING SOUND?
...A SIGN... OF LIFE...
...THE SERVITORS APPROACH...

I THOUGHT WE WERE ALONE DOWN HERE.
...IS SOLITUDE... EVER TRULY... POSSIBLE...?
ALL ARE WELCOME.
ALL ARE WELCOME.
ALL ARE WELCOME.
WHAT. THE. FUCK.
...SERVITORS... ESCORT US... TO THE INNER... SANCTUM...
VRRRRRRRM VRRRDDMM
...ALL... ARE... WELCOME...

CHOOM
CHOOM
CHOOM
DAMN IT!
...HOW... EXTRAORDINARY...
...ALL...
...ARE...
EXTRAORDINARY?!
...WELCOME...
CRRCHH
...WELCOME...
YOU FUCKING FATHERFUCKER!
SKRRSHH

WHAM!
NNGH!
CRRCH
...WELCOME...
...THIS IS...QUITE... THE DETERIORATION... OF YOUR... PROGRAMMING...
...WELCOME...
...SUCH...A... SHAME...

THESE ARE... METAL VERSIONS OF THE FERRYMAN. ALIVE, BUT NOT MADE OF FLESH.
WHY WOULD SHE MAKE SUCH CREATURES?
...THE BELOVED... DESIRED SERVANTS... SHE COULD TRUST...
...OF COURSE... BUT THESE... SHOULD NOT... HAVE ATTACKED...
...THEY KNOW... ME...
ARE THERE MORE?
THEN WE REALLY ARE SCREWED.
...THE LIBRARY... I HAD ALMOST FORGOTTEN...
...HER FAVORITES... WERE SHELVED... HERE...
...WE THOUGHT... WE WOULD RETURN... TO PRESERVE THE BOOKS...
...WE THOUGHT... THERE WAS TIME...
WHY *DIDN'T* YOU COME BACK?
TCHK
ERPP
CHRPP?
...YOU ARE HUNTED... BECAUSE OF WHAT... YOU ARE...
...DO YOU THINK... IT WAS ANY DIFFERENT... FOR THE BELOVED...?
HOW DID SHE SAVE HERSELF, THEN?
HOW DID SHE SAVE HERSELF WITH YOU INSIDE HER?

DREAMS MUST BE LOVED AS THEY ARE BORN...
...OR LIKE YOU... LOST FOREVER...

...WE HAD... A COVENANT...
...AND... SHE... WAS BRAVE...
...FAR BRAVER... THAN I...
I THINK... THE BLEEDING IS GETTING...
...WORSE.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE CROSSED THE WALL, MAIKA?
WE WERE SO WEAK WITH HUNGER WE COULD BARELY CRAWL. WE HAD NO SHOES.
NOW LOOK AT US.
ONCE, WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG, I SAW YOUR MOTHER.
SHE WAS AN HONORED GUEST... AND EVEN THEN SHE LOOKED EVERY INCH THE WARRIOR.
I DIDN'T TELL YOU. IT WOULD HAVE GIVEN TOO MUCH AWAY.
BUT I SUPPOSE THE TIME FOR SECRETS IS OVER.
WHO ARE YOU, TUYA?
WHO ARE YOU, REALLY?

...CHILD... YOU REMEMBER... WHAT HAS NEVER... HAPPENED...
...WHAT A STRANGE... THING... TO DO...
...AS I PREDICTED... THE SCENT OF FRESH MEAT... WOKE YOU...
GODDESS... PUT ME DOWN...
WHY AM I SO WEAK?
...THOSE WEAPONS... I SUSPECT... THERE WAS POISON...
THIS PLACE IS HELL.
...IT IS... HOME...
...WE HAVE REACHED... THE LAB...
...ODD...
...THIS... IS NOT... THE SEAL... THAT WAS HERE... BEFORE...

HUH.
WRRZZZHH
...HOW...?
YOU ALL KEEP TELLING ME I'VE GOT THE BLOOD, RIGHT?
WE'LL NEVER FIND THE SHIELD PARTS IN THIS MESS.
...WE... NEED NOT... FIND... ANYTHING...

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MASTER ZINN, YOU'VE RETURNED!
AND YOU BRING THE SACRED VESSEL WITH YOU!
OH, WHAT A JOYOUS, JOYOUS DAY... AFTER ALL THESE YEARS OF WAITING FOR THE --
...GUARDIAN... BRING THE... COUNTER-MEASURE...
URK--
...THE CHILD... WAS WOUNDED... BY ROGUE SERVITORS...
OF COURSE, OF COURSE.

SUCH A TERRIBLE DISGRACE THE SACRED VESSEL WAS SULLIED.
WE CANNOT HAVE THAT, NO, NO, NO.
DO YOU TRUST THIS THING?
...WHAT IS THERE... TO TRUST...?
...IT IS A MECHANISM... DESIGNED TO SERVE...
WHAT YOU CALL SERVICE AND WHAT I CALL SERVICE ARE PROBABLY VERY DIFFERENT.
THE MASKS ARE RISING, MASTER ZINN. YOU MUST HAVE SENSED IT. THE ALARMS WERE SO LOUD THE ENTIRE FACILITY SHOOK.
WE'RE NEARING THE TIME OF TRANSFORMATION. THE WALLS ARE THINNING, THE PRISON IS WEAKENING.
AND NOW SHE IS HERE. THE VESSEL FOR YOUR GOD-POWER.
THE ONE WHO WILL RESURRECT OUR SHAMAN-EMPRESS.
...YOU MEAN... THE BLOOD... AWAKENING... IN THE CHILD...
NO, O DESTROYER OF SPHERES.
SHE IS THE ONE WHO WILL BRING THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS BACK TO LIFE. NOT A REVENANT. NOT A SIMULACRUM. HER.
NOPE.
...IMPOSSIBLE...
IT IS PROPHESIED.
YOU SOUND LIKE MY MOTHER, SHE HAD A LOT OF BIG DREAMS, TOO.

I HOPE SHE REALIZED ALL OF THEM.
NOT REALLY. SHE GOT BLOWN TO PIECES.
WE'RE HERE TO FIND REPLACEMENT PARTS FOR THE SHIELD THAT PROTECTS THE CITY ABOVE US.
AH. WHAT YOU REQUIRE IS IN THE INNER SANCTUM. BUT THAT PARTICULAR GUARDIAN IS NOT... AT ITS BEST.
AND I'M AFRAID IT'S STILL ANGRY AT MASTER ZINN... FOR HIS BETRAYAL.
...BETRAYAL...?
...WHAT... FOOLISHNESS... IS THIS...?
OH, BOTHER. I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THE GATE TO THE INNER SANCTUM WAS LOCKED.
THE GUARDIAN MUST HAVE SENSED YOUR PRESENCE, MASTER ZINN.
BOOM!

CCRRUMMBLE
HHSSSSSSSS
...BE...
...TRAY...
...ER...
...WHAT... ABOMINATION... IS THIS...
YOUR SHAMAN-EMPRESS WAS ONE FUCKED UP --
WHACK!

CRACK!
...STAND... DOWN...!
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD TRY TALKING TO --
TALKING?! YOU TALK TO IT! WOULDN'T IT LISTEN TO YOU?
I AM BUT A HUMBLE --
FUCK.
...BE...
...UN...
...DONE...
ZINN! OUR LINK!
SLASH

URRRK!
SSLRRSHH
...I... AM... LOSING... PATIENCE... NOW...
GRRRSHH
WE WERE... NNGH... SEPARATED AND... NNGH... WE DIDN'T DIE.
SSHHHHP
...IT APPEARS... WE CAN SURVIVE... BRIEF AMPUTATION...
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
...THE SERVITOR... IS TOO STRONG... I HAVE... ONLY BOUGHT US... A FEW MOMENTS...
...INNER SANCTUM... SEAL... THE DOORS!
BOOM!

...THIS DOES... NOT SEEM... LIKE A CREATION... OF THE BELOVED...
GUARDIAN, DON'T YOU KNOW ANY WAY TO STOP THIS THING?
I'M SORRY TO REPORT THAT I DO NOT.
KRAAAAKK!
YOU REALLY MUST HAVE BETRAYED HER GOOD, ZINN.
...I WOULD NEVER... BETRAY... THE BELOVED... NEVER...
BUT YOU DID BETRAY HER, FIRST DESTROYER. I SAW IT WITH MY OWN SENSORS.
...YOU LIE...
KRAAAAAKKKK!
WORRY ABOUT YOUR HURT FEELINGS LATER, ZINN.
WE CAN'T LET IT SEVER US AGAIN. I DON'T THINK I HAVE THE STRENGTH.
...BUT WE CANNOT... STAND TOO CLOSE... OR WE... WILL IMPEDE... EACH OTHER...
BETRAYER!
THEN WE KEEP MOVING SO IT DOESN'T GET ANOTHER CHANCE.
KRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAKKKK

... YOU ARE UNWORTHY... OF THE SACRED VESSEL... !
WRAMM
UFFFFF!
I HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS SHIT.
ZINN, GIVE ME YOUR STRENGTH.
... YOUR BODY... WILL NOT... SURVIVE...
GIVE ME WHAT YOU CAN, WHAT I CAN LIVE THROUGH.

TRUST ME, IN THE NAME OF YOUR BELOVED...
...PLEASE TRUST ME.
...IF WE DO NOT... MEET AGAIN... CHILD...
...MAY YOU FIND... PEACE...
STRIKE HIM IN THE HEAD. WHERE IT'LL HURT MOST.
I KNOW... WHERE IT HURTS... MOST.
CCRRZZZZRRZZ
ZZZZT.

...ALL ALONG... THE GUARDIAN WAS IN CONTROL...
...HOW... DID YOU... KNOW... IT... HAD BETRAYED US...?
CCRRZZZZRRZZ
ZZZZT. ZZZZT.
ZZZZT. ZZZZT.
YOU REALLY... NNNGH... CAN'T TELL... NNNNGH... WHEN PEOPLE DON'T LIKE YOU... CAN YOU?
...LORD... DESTROYER...
CCRRZZZZRRZZ
...IF ONLY... I HAD SEVERED YOU... COMPLETELY.. FROM THE SACRED VESSEL...
...SHE... IS THE KEY...
...REDEEM YOUR TREACHERY..
...BRING BACK... THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS...
...THE... PRO... PHE... CY...

Tuya.
What are you doing, I wonder? Right at this moment?
...CHILD...
...WHY DO I... NOT REMEMBER... THIS BETRAYAL...
MAYBE YOU DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER.
I want to imagine you, standing in the sun, warm with light.
...THE GUARDIAN... WAS MISTAKEN... THE BELOVED CAN... NEVER RETURN... NEVER...
...NOT EVEN IN YOU... DOES SHE...EXIST... EXCEPT AS BLOOD...
I'D RATHER -- NNGH -- NOT FIND OUT. I'M ALREADY A -- NNGH -- VESSEL FOR YOU AND THAT'S ENOUGH.

But I've never felt so far from you...even in my dreams when you are with me.
NNGH -- NOT THAT YOU CARE -- NNGH -- BUT IT'S GETTING EASIER TO FIGHT THE HUNGER.
...HUNGER... IS NOT... AN ILLNESS... CHILD...
...HUNGER... IS... A GIFT...
AIIIYEEEEE!!!!
SSHUMMP
...A GIFT...
I want to remember your eyes, Tuya.
But I can't.
TO BE CONTINUED...

An excerpt of a lecture from the esteemed **Professor Tam Tam,** former First Record-Keeper of the Is'hami Temple, and learned contemporary of Namron Black Claw...
FOR UBASTI!
RARELY DO CATS INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE ANCIENTS OR THEIR HALFBREED CHILDREN. WE OBSERVE, CERTAINLY -- OUR POETS, AFTER ALL, RECORD THE TRUTH OF THE WORLD AS UBASTI HERSELF CHARGED US SO LONG AGO.
AND THOUGH WE CATS ARE FOUND IN NEARLY EVERY REALM -- WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE FEDERATION -- WE DO NOT NEED ANYONE ELSE. CATS, AFTER ALL, WERE HERE BEFORE ALL OTHERS -- WE ARE THE FIRST RACE -- AND WE WILL BE THE LAST. ON THIS WORLD, AND EVERY OTHER.
BUT WE ARE NOT ALONE YET.
SINCE THE DAWN OF THE FIRST AGE WE KEPT WATCH, WE CHRONICLED, AND WE DID NOT INTERFERE. SUCH WAS OUR WAY.
THE GREAT WAR CHANGED ALL OF THAT.
THE FEDERATION HAD NEVER BEFORE SHOWN ANY INTEREST IN CATS. WE WERE A BREED APART, BUT WE WERE NOT THEIR ENEMIES. YET, DURING THE WAR, THE FEDERATION TROOPS TOLERATED NO CAT TO LIVE.
WE WERE DRIVEN FROM OUR TEMPLES AND WE WERE SLAUGHTERED BY THE THOUSANDS. IN THE FACE OF IMMINENT DEATH OUR PEOPLE FOUGHT BACK.
THE WAR IS OVER. WE CATS PLAYED OUR PART AND DID SO WITH TENACITY AND COURAGE. BUT THE QUESTION REMAINS... *WHY* DID THE FEDERATION SUDDENLY BECOME INTERESTED IN CATS?
WHO WAS BEHIND THIS MURDEROUS PROJECT... WHO OR *WHAT?*
RISE UP AGAINST THE FEDERATION!
Homage H. COLDESAC from Soho Press.

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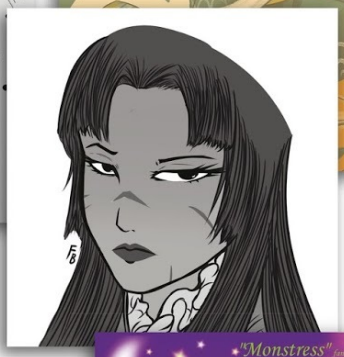

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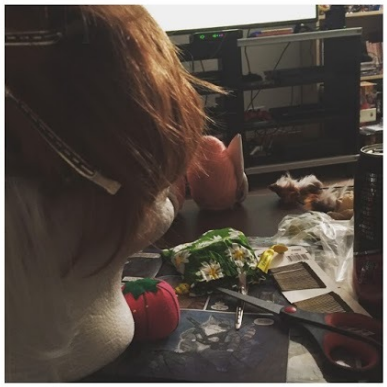

Ears and tail made by: Little Lycan
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KIPPA COSPLAY

NEXT ISSUE

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